

THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF NURSES *

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THROUGH no fault of the secretary, this paper was assigned to me at so late a day that, with my own hospital duties just now a little excessive, I found myself quite unable to carry out a plan which would have enabled us to secure the individual views of many of the superintendents of schools of nursing, and consequently may possibly have failed to bring out the idea as intended by those who arranged the program of to-day.

The question of the education and training of nurses has so many aspects to be considered, that to treat it exhaustively would take a much more lengthy paper than I have had opportunity to prepare; so we can only hope to touch upon some of the features now existing, and, possibly, offer some ideas that may at least aid us in answering satisfactorily to ourselves and others the criticisms made upon the present system.

Are the nurses of to-day overtrained? Can you conceive of young women who are to assume the responsibilities connected with the work of trained nursing being too well trained?

Because of the criticism charging that nurses are being trained beyond the necessary point, it is well that we should consider it calmly and judicially, and come to our decisions only after careful consideration.

If the right sort of preliminary education could in every instance be met with, then this work would be very much simplified. Kindly pause and consider: in the three years' course we find that in addition to imparting what is deemed the strictly necessary technical knowledge (whether rightly or wrongly determined as to degree remains to be decided) we need to develop latent qualities which nothing in the young woman's life has ever before called into play, to eradicate false notions which are detrimental to a correct conception of our profession, to encourage characteristics favorable to her development

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as a nurse, to discourage traits inimical to her professional success, to cultivate habits of neatness, method, and to insure the acceptance of the discipline which must prevail in order to protect properly the great human interests intrusted to us.

It is doubtless true that we have reached an epoch in the history of trained nursing when we need a shaking up. Is it not possible that we have submitted too readily to conditions and realized too little how possible the working out of a good system must always be when one has the courage of her convictions, or that, on the other hand, in the endeavor to secure improved methods, the environment has not received enough consideration?

It is axiomatic that strength and development, either physical, mental, or moral, come only through the exercise of organs of faculties. Do we want young women who have no ambitions, no aspirations? No one will answer affirmatively, I am sure. Then, what have we to offer them?

In the human economy a great lesson is taught us: namely, that an equalization of supply and demand secures the normal. May this not be true in the training of the nurse? Give her knowledge well tempered by an intelligent understanding of the deeper meaning which creates the difference between trained and untrained nursing, give her increasing responsibilities following upon a comprehensive fundamental theoretical knowledge, and you vastly increase your chances of securing the proper balance.

The long standing method of uniting the theoretical and practical education of the nurse is, very possibly, responsible to a large degree for the shortcomings of trained nurses. Already some of our larger schools have taken steps to break away from this custom; but what are the majority of the schools doing? What should—and would in most instances, under proper conditions—be a joy and delight to our pupils, is made a burden, and all too often a cause of loss of nerve vigor.

Why? Because at present, where the old system is adhered to, the preparation of the theoretical work on the part of the pupil is mainly made under more or less physical strain. The meeting of the requirements in too many instances makes it impossible to give proper attention to the best interests of our pupils in the matter of taking them through their course with unimpaired health. I do not wish to be understood as implying that we are sending forth invalids, but too many go forth from their training with a loss of youthful vigor and good recuperative powers.

Perfect our system as we will, there will never come a time when nurses can be sufficiently well trained without some physical weariness; but under correct conditions that can do no harm. Separate the burden of the theoretical from the practical, letting the practice be expression of the theory already learned, and you have minimized the danger of pushing your pupils beyond a rational point as regards their health, and, further, you have furnished them with a broader opportunity to escape the dangers of the imperfectly trained nurse.

Because of the fact that the major part of the instruction of the pupils is conducted by either the superintendent or the supervisor of nurses—and, naturally, the former, with her general hospital duties, cannot spend many hours in this manner—a plan must be devised that will consume as little of the time of these two officials in the strictly class work as possible. Therefore, herewith is offered a tentative plan which is perhaps adapted to hospitals having from seventy-five to one hundred and fifty beds, and such as embrace the superintendent of hospital and training-school under one head. In such hospitals let there be schools numbering from thirty to fifty pupils, the scope of the work embracing both private and ward patients, the service including medical, surgical, gynaecological, contagion, care of children, and obstetrical experience, the latter obtaining either in the home institution or through affiliation with some maternity hospital. The plan of work provides that the applicants shall enter in two sections, the first in March and the second in June. The probationers may spend from seven to nine A.M. daily on the wards, from nine A.M. till four P.M. in class instruction, demonstration work, relief time, and study periods. At four P.M. they return to the wards, where they may assist in many of the less responsible features of the work that are bound to arise, as also in some of the routine duties incident to closing up the day nurses' work. It is true that the use of such a plan will necessitate the repetition of the work each year, and that may possibly be regarded as one of the objections. At the end of the first three months for the second group, and the first six months for the first group, the two may be merged into the Junior class, and the study of more advanced work begun. In order to do this, the Junior nurse must not be expected to serve on the wards more than eight hours.

I appreciate the difficulties that might arise, but I believe that thus confining the theoretical work, in a large measure, to the first year, arranging that that of the second should be such as will not require a great amount of preparation, and providing that the third year shall be a time of development and application of the principles

already learned, will tend toward removing many of the objectionable features of the system. When we realize the numberless phases of practical knowledge that can be mastered only through the actual assumption of duties and responsibilities, we can appreciate the value of leaving the nurse in her third year unfettered with preparatory work. When her twelve hours of duty are ended she may relax and allow her mind to turn to subjects foreign to nursing.

When that millennial day so alluringly pictured to the ignorant and unwary dawns, when short-cut methods such as are offered by correspondence schools prevail, then will physicians and the laity appreciate the need of almost military requirements to produce nurses who are well fitted to assume the responsibilities inherent in their work. I doubt very much whether the tremendous responsibilities assumed by superintendents of schools of nursing are generally appreciated. The endless planning and study required to provide adequate service in all the departments of the hospital, the meeting of the varied requirements of physicians, patients, and patrons, the providing for the daily, yes, hourly exigencies which arise through the unexpected and unavoidable, emphasize the need of alert, well-informed nurses to interpret and execute the constant calls for action.

While I am only too conscious that I have left far more unsaid than I have said, still I earnestly hope that these few words have given some food for thought that will aid us in meeting this question promptly, and will bear fruit in action that will be for the betterment of our profession, which undoubtedly has come to stay, but upon what basis rests entirely with the trained nurses of to-day.



BROWN BREAD

THIS is the brown bread for which Mrs. Grover Cleveland's table is famed:

One bowl Indian meal, one bowl rye flour, one bowl sour milk, one large cup molasses, one teaspoonful soda, one teaspoonful salt. The whole must be mixed thoroughly and steamed two and a half hours, then baked from twenty minutes to a half-hour, depending upon the heat of the oven.